

Testimony of Sarah White In Support of:
House Bill 5673: AN ACT CONCERNING THE REFORMATION OF CERTAIN
TAXES AND TAX EQUITY.

Dear Senator Fonfara, Representative Horn, and the distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee:

My name is Sarah White and I live in Hartford, Connecticut. I am involved in the Cap the Rent CT campaign and organize with Connecticut DSA and the Connecticut Tenants Union. We are here in support of Recovery for All, a statewide coalition fighting for a better future for Connecticut, bringing together more than 60 community, faith, and labor organizations.

I am testifying in strong support of House Bill 5673: An Act Concerning The Reformation Of Certain Taxes And Tax Equity. We are the wealthiest state in the nation, and we have abundant resources to ensure that all of us have housing, food, medical care, education and what we need not just to survive but to flourish. But instead we have some of the most extreme income inequality in the nation, and a housing system that exploits working class renters for corporate profits rather than prioritizing that we all need a safe home.

More than half of Connecticut renters are cost-burdened, meaning they pay more than 30% of their gross income on housing, widely considered to be an unaffordable and unsustainable amount. Rent has skyrocketed, up more than 20% in the last two years, with increases of 40%+ in some municipalities and in some apartment complexes. Homelessness is increasing—for every \$100 rent increase, homelessness goes up 9%. In 2022 we had the most eviction filings in a year, and on Valentine's day of this year, there were the most eviction filings in a single day, going back to at least 2017 when we started keeping consolidated electronic records.

Here in Hartford, a city that's about 75% renters, thousands of tenants have to choose between a roof over their heads and going to the grocery store or getting medical care. We've organized with tenants in complexes where virtually everyone has gotten rent increases of \$200 - \$400, plus new fees tacked on so the corporate landlord can make even more money. These aren't luxury or even well-maintained apartments. They're rundown, they're roach and rat infested, they're filled with mold, the elevator that elderly and disabled tenants rely on might be broken for months or even over a year, they're unsafe and undignified, but tenants have very few other options. When these corporate landlords jack up the rent, that's money families have to come up with basically overnight. Wages and social security or disability have not kept up. So what happens? Renters go without, they double up with family if there's room, or they fall behind, and they get evicted and possibly become homeless.

And this is not just happening in Hartford. It's happening in Bloomfield, Windsor, Middletown, New Haven, Hamden, Bristol, and in other towns and cities across the state where we've organized with tenants, many of whom are being displaced by rising rents as corporate landlords speculate on their housing for profit.

It doesn't have to be this way. Many of the large corporations pay virtually nothing in taxes and some of the wealthiest individuals pay just a tiny fraction of their income, even as working class people pay about 25% of their annual income in state and local taxes.

We have enough resources in Connecticut to ensure that everyone has housing, and that their housing is safe, well-maintained, affordable, and secure—that it's a home and not just a roof over their heads. With increased tax revenue, we could shift our housing system from one centered on profit to one centered on our shared need for a home. For example, we could fund a publicly-owned housing developer to build the housing that we want, not just that's profitable which could remain publicly owned and affordable to all residents.

We have an unprecedented opportunity – and the resources – to create a state where everyone has good healthcare to lead healthy lives, high quality childcare and schools for their kids, a good job to support their families, and a safe place to call home. **I urge the Committee to have the courage to make the right choice and pass House Bill 5673: An Act Concerning The Reformation Of Certain Taxes And Tax Equity.**

Thank you,
Sarah White
Hartford, Connecticut